

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 IO-10 DHA-02 ACDA-05 CIAE-00 DODE-00

PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01

SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 AID-05 PC-01 /080 W

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R 191630Z DEC 75

FM AMEMBASSY LA PAZ

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9093

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 LA PAZ 8928

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PINT, BL

SUBJECT: HUMAN RIGHTS IN BOLIVIA

REF: A) LA PAZ A-24 (FEB 24, 1975)

B) LA PAZ 7118; C) LA PAZ 4978

D) LA PAZ 8767

1. SUMMARY: THE YEAR 1975 HAS SEEN LITTLE
SIGNIFICANT CHANGE IN THE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION
IN BOLIVIA. BANS ON POLITICAL AND UNION ACTIVITIES,
ASSEMBLIES OR DEMONSTRATIONS ARE STILL ON THE BOOKS
ALTHOUGH MODIFIED IN PRACTICE. CENSORSHIP OF THE
PRESS IS LARGELY SELF-IMPOSED. POLITICAL PRISONERS
NUMBER AROUND 120. VARIOUS ORGANIZATIONS INCLUDING
THE CHURCH, UNIONS, PROFESSIONAL AND LEGAL
ASSOCIATIONS AND A SMALL GROUP OF PRIVATE CITIZENS
MOUNTED A WELL PUBLICIZED CAMPAIGN FOR AMNESTY
FOR POLITICAL PRISONERS AND EXILES IN NOVEMBER.
HOWEVER, THE GOVERNMENT'S RECENT CAPTURE OF A
TERRORIST GROUP HAS DIMMED THE PROSPECTS THAT THIS
CAMPAIGN WILL PRODUCE A WIDESPREAD AMNESTY FOR
BOLIVIAN POLITICAL PRISONERS OR EXILES. END SUMMARY.

2. AN INFORMED OBSERVER OF THE BOLIVIAN SCENE
DISTINGUISHES FOUR PHASES IN THE BANZER GOVERNMENT'S
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POLICIES REGARDING HUMAN RIGHTS. IMMEDIATELY

AFTER BANZER'S COUP IN AUGUST 1971 A SOMEWHAT ANARCHICAL SITUATION EXISTED. PEOPLE WERE KILLED, IMPRISONED AND "HUNDREDS" WERE EXILED. SEVERAL PEOPLE SOUGHT REVENGE FOR WRONGS SUFFERED UNDER THE TORRES REGIME. THE SECOND PHASE WAS ONE NOTORIOUS FOR PHYSICAL PUNISHMENT OF POLITICAL OPPONENTS. REPORTS OF TORTURE, RAPE AND MISTREATMENT OF A FEW WOMEN IMPRISONED DURING THIS PERIOD PROMPTED A PUBLIC CAMPAIGN ON THEIR BEHALF MOUNTED BY CONCERNED CITIZENS. THE GOVERNMENT THEN RELEASED ALL WOMEN HELD PRISONER. THE NEXT PHASE SAW A TENDENCY TO FAVOR EXILE OVER INCARCERATION OF POLITICAL OPPONENTS. SINCE MAY 1973 THE PATTERN OF THE GOVERNMENT'S ACTIONS HAS CHANGED. THE NUMBER OF POLITICAL PRISONERS HAS DECREASED. A PERSONNEL CHANGE IN THE MINISTRY OF INTERIOR STOPPED MUCH OF THE PAST PRACTICE OF TORTURE. POLITICAL "SUSPECTS" WERE OFTEN DETAINED ONLY A FEW DAYS. PRISONS TOOK ON SOMETHING OF THE CHARACTER OF A HOTEL. CONSEQUENTLY, ACCURATE DATA REGARDING NUMBERS IMPRISONED WAS DIFFICULT TO OBTAIN. THE GOVERNMENT'S POLICY TOWARD "POLITICAL" ACTIVITIES BECAME MORE SUBTLE. IT RELIED OFTEN MORE ON MENACE THAN ACTUAL IMPRISONMENT.

3. THE GOVERNMENT'S DECREE OF NOVEMBER 1974 BANNING POLITICAL ACTIVITIES, SUSPENDING ASSOCIATIONS OF BUSINESSMEN, UNIONS AND UNIVERSITY GROUPS AND PROHIBITING STRIKES OR OTHER INTERRUPTIONS REMAINS ON THE BOOKS. HOWEVER, CERTAIN EXCEPTIONS HAVE BEEN TOLERATED. AFTER A TROUBLED FEW MONTHS EARLY IN 1975 WHICH SAW CONFLICTS WITH BOTH THE CHURCH AND THE UNIONS (PARTICULARLY THE MINERS) THE GOVERNMENT ADOPTED A SOMEWHAT MORE FLEXIBLE POLICY AND ATTEMPTED TO AVOID OPEN CONFLICTS. IMPRISONED NATIONAL LEADERS OF THE MINEWORKERS FEDERATION WERE RELEASED. UNION ELECTIONS IN THE MINES OF SIGLO XX AND CATAVI ALTHOUGH THEORETICALLY ILLEGAL

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WERE IGNORED BY THE GOVERNMENT. ON DECEMBER 15, ELEVEN MINEWORKERS OF SAN JOSE WERE ARRESTED. A STRIKE BY THE SAN JOSE MINERS SECURED THE RELEASE OF THESE UNION LEADERS A FEW DAYS LATER. ALSO A CHURCH REPRESENTATIVE HAS VISITED POLITICAL PRISONERS. HE USUALLY CAN SECURE ACCESS TO DETAINEES ONCE INFORMED OF THEIR ARREST. LIMITED POLITICAL ACTION BY

THE FALANGISTA SOCIALISTA BOLIVIANA (FSB)
AND ELEMENTS OF THE MOVEMENTO NACIONAL
REVOLUCIONARIO HAS ALSO BEEN TOLERATED.

4. THE BOLIVIAN BISHOPS CONFERENCE PETITIONED
THE BANZER GOVERNMENT IN NOVEMBER FOR A GENERAL
POLITICAL AMNESTY OF POLITICAL PRISONERS AND
EXILES. THE BISHOPS PETITION CONTAINED LITTLE
UNEXPECTED GIVEN THE APPROACHING CHRISTMAS
SEASON. THE HIERARCHY SEEMED DETERMINED TO
AVOID A CONFRONTATION WITH THE GOVERNMENT OVER
THIS ISSUE. THEY NOTED FOR EXAMPLE THE ABSENCE
OF REPORTS OF TORTURE. NONETHELESS THE
AMNESTY PETITION AFFORDED A RESPECTABLE BASE
FOR LATER AMNESTY PLEAS AND ALSO STRESSED THE
BISHOP'S PREOCCUPATION THAT THE RIGHTS OF UNIONS
BE RESTORED. THE FEDERATION OF MINE WORKERS OF
BOLIVIA (FSTMB) APPLAUDED THE BISHOP'S STATEMENT
AND MADE A STRONG APPEAL OF ITS OWN ON BEHALF OF
POLITICAL PRISONERS AND EXILES AND FOR THE
RESTORATION OF AUTONOMY AND INDEPENDENCE FOR
BOLIVIAN UNIONS.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 LA PAZ 8928

5. A SMALL GROUP ASSOCIATED WITH FORMER
BOLIVIAN PRESIDENT LUIS ALDOLFO SILES
SALINES AND ASSISTED BY THE PUBLICITY
FURNISHED BY A MORNING DAILY OF LA PAZ,

PRESENCIA, ENCOURAGED APPEALS FOR AMNESTY FROM SEVERAL SECTORS OF THE BOLIVIAN COMMUNITY. THE BOLIVIAN ASSOCIATION OF LAWYERS, THE BOLIVIAN PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATION, THE FACTORY WORKERS FEDERATION AND ITS LOCALS OF LA PAZ AND COCHABAMBA, THE FEDERATION OF MINeworkERS AND SEVERAL OF ITS LOCALS, THE YOUNG MEMBERS OF THE FALANGISTA SOCIALISTA BOLIVIANA AND THE JOURNALIST'S ASSOCIATION OF LA PAZ ARE AMONG THE MAJOR GROUPS THAT HAVE PUBLICLY PETITIONED THE GOVERNMENT FOR A GENERAL AMNESTY.

6. THE CENTRAL LATINO AMERICANO DE TRABAJADORES (CLAT), THE CONFEDERATION OF VENEZUELAN WORKERS AND VARIOUS VENEZUELAN SENATORS AND CONGRESSMEN ADDED THEIR PLEAS TO THE GOVERNMENT FOR AMNESTY FOR EXILED OR IMPRISONED BOLIVIANS. (THE VENEZUELAN WORKERS CONFERENCE FOCUSED ON THE IMPRISONMENT OF JOSE ANTEZANA, AND IMPRISONED UNION LEADER WHO REPORTEDLY IS ILL). THE JAPANESE CATHOLIC COMMISSION FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE ALSO PETITIONED THE BANZER GOVERNMENT FOR A CONFIDENTIAL

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GENERAL AMNESTY. THE TOTAL EFFECT OF THESE PETITIONS PUBLICIZED IN MOST BOLIVIAN NEWSPAPERS WAS ONE OF MOUNTING PRESSURE FOR A FAIRLY GENEROUS CHRISTMAS AMNESTY. AND THERE WERE STATEMENTS BY GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS IMPLYING THAT SUCH AN AMNESTY WOULD BE FORTHCOMING.

7. THE HIGH POINT OF THESE EFFORTS PROBABLY WAS THE PUBLICATION OF A LIST OF 119 POLITICAL PRISONERS COMPILED FROM THE STATEMENTS OF RELATIVES WHICH APPEARED IN PRESENCIOA, DECEMBER 10, 1975. THE INTRODUCTION TO THE LIST NOTED THE DIFFICULTIES OF OBTAINING PRECISE INFORMATION AND THE CONSEQUENT PROBABILITY OF DISCREPANCIES. NONETHELESS THE LIST SEEMS THE MOST DETAILED ONE AVAILABLE. IN ADDITION TO NAMES, THE LIST PROVIDES SOME OTHER FRAGMENTARY INFORMATION ABOUT POLITICAL DETAINEES. FOR EXAMPLE, THE LENGTH OF IMPRISONMENT IS PROVIDED FOR SEVENTY-ONE CAPTIVES. EIGHT HAVE BEEN HELD LONGER THAN TEN MONTHS AND FIFTY FOR SIX MONTHS OR LESS. FIFTEEN OF THE PRISONERS WERE IDENTIFIED AS STUDENTS OR PROFESSORS (REF. LA PAZ 7118) AND SEVENTEEN, AS GRUPO ORURO. THE LATTER GROUP ARRESTED IN JULY 1975 INCLUDES EXILED

SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE OUTLAWED BOLIVIAN WORKERS CONFEDERATION (C.O.B.) RENE HIGUERAS (REF LA PAZ 4978). THREE WOMEN ARE ON THE LIST. MISS LOYALA GUZMAN WHO "VISITED" THE MINISTRY OF INTERIOR DECEMBER 6 AND HAS NOT SINCE BEEN HEARD FROM IS NOT LISTED. NOR ARE SEVEN STUDENTS RECENTLY REPORTED IMPRISONED.

8. COMMENT: AS NOTED EARLIER, THE HOPES OF INTERESTED BOLIVIANS FOR A WIDESPREAD AMNESTY WERE DAMPENED BY THE GOVERNMENT'S CAPTURE OF EIGHT REVOLUTIONARIES IN COCHABAMBA ANNOUNCED DECEMBER 10 (REF D.) HOWEVER, PRESIDENT BANZER STATED DECEMBER 17 THAT "THOSE WHO DID NOT CONSTITUTE A SERIOUS DANGER TO THE TRANQUILITY
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AND STABILITY OF THE COUNTRY WOULD BE RELEASED OR COULD RETURN." THE GOVERNMENT'S AMNESTY LIST IS EXPECTED THIS WEEKEND. WE WILL KEEP DEPARTMENT INFORMED.

9. FROM A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE THE LAST EIGHTEEN MONTHS OR TWO YEARS HAS POSSIBLY BEEN ONE OF THE MORE CIVILIZED PERIODS OF BOLIVIAN HISTORY IN TERMS OF HUMAN RIGHTS. FOR CERTAIN SECTORS THE EXILE ISSUE REMAINS A SERIOUS ONE. ALTHOUGH ESTIMATES OF EXILES RUN AS HIGH AS 5,000 THE ACTUAL NUMBER MAY BE CONSIDERABLY LOWER, PARTICULARLY IF ONE DOES NOT COUNT SELF-IMPOSED EXILE. VIEWED FROM THE CONCENTRATION CAMP DAYS OF THE FIFTIES (WITH PERHAPS 15,000 IN JAILS) OR FROM THE GOVERNMENT'S MASSACRES AND MURDERS DURING THE SIXTIES, THE BANZER GOVERNMENT'S PERFORMANCE APPEARS A CLEAR STEP FORWARD. THE GOVERNMENT'S POSSESSION OF OVERWHELMING FORCE, THE COUNTRY'S ECONOMIC GROWTH AND THE INCREASING SELF-CONFIDENCE OF GOVERNMENT MEMBERS HAVE UNDOUBTEDLY CONTRIBUTED TO THIS AMELIORATION. SOMEWHAT PARADOXICALLY THE STRENGTH AND STABILITY OF BANZER'S GOVERNMENT HAS SHARPENED CRITICISM OF ITS SUPPRESSIVE TACTICS. A COMMON THEME OF THE AMNESTY CAMPAIGN WAS THE ASSERTION THAT THE GOVERNMENT HAD LITTLE TO FEAR FROM INCREASED POLITICAL ACTIVITIES. HOWEVER, AS AN INFORMED OBSERVER NOTED INSENSITIVITY TO HUMAN RIGHTS IS IN NO WAY A UNIQUE CHARACTERISTIC OF BANZER'S GOVERNMENT BUT RATHER A GENERAL PROBLEM

OF BOLIVIAN SOCIETY AS A WHOLE, WHATEVER
REGIME HAPPENS TO BE IN POWER.

END COMMENT.
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